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MURAL PAINTINGS AT BOSTON

CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editor of THE ARTIST:

The May-June number of THE ARTIST contains an article on the "Proposed Competition for Mural Paintings in the Massachusetts State-house," which is so absolutely barren of a knowledge of the facts relative to the hearing given by the Committee on State-house to the Boston Artists and their opponents as to render correction necessary.

In the first place, the writer of the article obtained her ideas from the account of the hearing as given by a reporter on the Boston *Evening Transcript*, and the following paragraph from that paper is given in full:

"The hearing was closed without further action, leaving the Artists, as they said, in the delicate position of feeling that they had been ignored, yet unable to take any further steps in the matter without danger of doing injustice to brother artists of unquestioned ability, and who have gone ahead with their designs in good faith."

Nothing could be further from the truth of what actually did happen than this statement, and while every newspaper in Boston gave a full and accurate account of the proceedings, the *Transcript's* version was so entirely erroneous as to render its statement absolutely worthless. The Committee of Artists petitioned the legislative committee having the matter in charge for a public hearing, their petition was granted and the Artists appeared, likewise Gen. Loring, Mrs. Sarah W. Whitman and one or two others. The supporters of Mr. Endicott also possessed the advantage of a legal representative, whose attempt at cross-questioning proved a failure.

The hearing was opened by the reading of the petition by the Clerk of the Committee on State-house, and the Artists were then called upon to present their case, which briefly was that they desired an open competition, and no cut and dried arrangement which would debar them from having anything to do with the proposed decorations. They did not ask that the competition be limited to Massachusetts artists, though they might well have done so, but they desired to secure the best possible results in the interests of the State, and therefore asked that the competition be thrown open to the artists of the country, taking care

to debar artists of American birth who have elected to expatriate themselves.

Gen. Loring and Mrs. Whitman spoke in opposition, and at the conclusion of Mrs. Whitman's remarks the committee unanimously requested the Artists to draw up a bill and present it to the committee.

This was a complete victory for the Artists and their position; therefore, the hearing was closed, not "without further action"; on the contrary. The Artists were left, not in a "delicate position," but in a victorious one. The bill was drawn up by the Artists themselves, cutting down the amount asked for by Mr. Endicott, namely, \$37,000, to \$25,000, presented to the legislative committee, adopted by that committee and reported to the Legislature.

This is a concise *resumé* of the entire proceedings. Mr. Endicott, on the statement made by the Chairman of the Committee on State-house, had no authority whatever to promise or negotiate with any artist, and the Committee of Boston Artists assured themselves that they stood upon perfectly honorable ground before they proceeded to try their case.

If the author of the article in THE ARTIST had taken pains to secure a copy of the bill she would not have written her essay on the subject of competition as related to mural painting, which takes what is presumed to be too much valuable space and is hardly worthy of serious comment.

WALTER GILMAN PAGE,

Boston, Mass.



BOOK REVIEWS.

ALPHABETS, OLD AND NEW: Containing over one hundred and fifty complete alphabets, thirty series of numerals, and numerous fac-similes of ancient dates, etc., for the use of craftsmen, with an introductory essay on "Art in the Alphabet." By LOUIS F. DAY (Charles Scribner's Sons).

This book, as the author explains, is intended to show the development of letter forms and the shape they took at different periods, and also to suggest the endless variations which may yet be played upon shapes more or less fixed for us by custom. Mr. Day

ALPHABETS OLD AND NEW

lays down two conditions on which the artist may be permitted to tamper with the alphabet: Whatever he does ought, in the first place, to make reading run smoother; and, in the second, to make writing satisfactory to the eye. The way to make reading easier is to mark whatever is characteristic in the letter; to develop what is peculiar to it; to curtail, or it may be to lop off, anything which tends to make us confound it with another; to emphasize, in short, the individuality of each individual letter and make it unmistakable. At the same time there is no reason why reading should not be made pleasant as well as easy. Beauty, that is to say, is worth bearing in mind. It must not, of course, interfere with use; but there is not the least reason why it should. Beauty does not imply elaboration or ornament.

Naturally, what Mr. Day has to say of inventiveness is mainly of a negative character. "It is of no use trying to evolve brand-new alphabets out of your inner consciousness. Originality is what we all desire; but it is scarcely the thing to seek consciously, least of all in lettering; it comes of its own accord if ever it comes. We are original or we are not."

Quite a large number of the 178 plates consist of modern examples more or less closely related to older forms, but some displaying a freshness of invention not always to be accepted readily. However, it must be remembered that an alphabet, as such, shows the letters least advantageously. It is when they are combined into words and considered in relation to their space or accompanying ornament, and also to the material and method of execution, that a fair judgment can be formed of them. In this last particular the book is of specially practical value to the designer. It invites attention to the variations of form resulting from the tool employed and the material used—points much too often overlooked. For this and many other reasons the book is one that the designer will be glad to have near him for reference and inspiration.

COMPANIONS FOR THE COUNTRY.

At this season of the year, when townfolk are seeking the country and country folk are best repaid for their banishment from town, it is not amiss to draw attention to a few books which will add to the keen enjoyment of coun-

try life. How much the love of flowers is stimulated by a little knowledge of them! It is one of those cases where a little knowledge is not dangerous. The ordinary wayfarer has neither the time nor the capacity for an exhaustive study of botany. What he needs is information sufficiently scientific to be thorough as far as it goes, and yet simple and attractive; a book that will be a companion for his leisure instead of a further taskmaster upon his time. If such a book is one that an intelligent child also can consult, extracting from it just so much as she is capable of assimilating, even if it be only the name of the flower that she has delighted to gather, then it seems to admirably fulfil its purpose of being a family *vade mecum* for the holidays.

A GUIDE TO THE WILD FLOWERS, by ALICE LOUNSBERRY, illustrated by Mrs. ELLIS ROWAN (F. A. Stokes Company: New York), seems to satisfy these conditions. It opens with "A Chapter to Study," in which the author has collected and explained the terms used to describe the organs of a plant. In this way the necessary "little knowledge" is made most easily and expeditiously procurable. Then follows a brief chapter on "Five Conspicuous Plant Families." In the body of the book the plants are grouped according to their environment: for example, under the heading of "Plants Growing in Water," "Plants Growing in Mud," and so on. Then, besides an index of English names and one of Latin, there is an index of color, which makes the book very easy for reference, even to one who is entirely ignorant of the subject. The student is still further assisted by sixty-four colored and one hundred black and white plates, as well as by fifty-four diagrams. This is Mrs. Rowan's share of the work, and most admirably it has been accomplished. For the way in which her drawings have been reproduced and for the general make-up of this handsome volume the publishers must be highly commended.

FIELD, FOREST AND WAYSIDE FLOWERS, with Chapters on Grasses, Sedges and Ferns, by MAUD GOING (The Baker & Taylor Company, New York).

"The chapters of this book are so arranged as to follow the waxing and waning of plant-life during an average season in the North-eastern United States. It is intended more